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NICK CARTER



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PARDONED BY THE PRESIDENT;

Or, Nick Carter at the United States Treasury.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "NICK CARTER."



"NUMBER 967, FALL OUT!" AT THIS COMMAND ED SANDERS, THE BANK ROBBER, DROPPED OUT OF THE LINE.

Pardoned by the President;

OR,

Nick Carter at the United States Treasury.

By the author of "NICK CARTER."

CHAPTER I.

THE PARDON OF ED SANDERS.

The convicts were marching across the prison-yard.

"Number 967 fall out."

At this command Ed Sanders, the bank robber, dropped out of the line and went with a guard to the prison-office.

Warden Rockwell sat at his desk looking over some papers. One of them had the Great Seal of the United States on it.

"You may go, Jacobs," said the warden to the guard.

When Jacobs was gone the warden got up and held out his hand in a friendly way to the convict.

"Sanders, I have some good news for you," said he.

"What good news can there be for a man doing twenty years here?"

"You are not doing twenty years. In less than an hour you will be free."

"Free?"

"Yes. It has been proved that you didn't rob that bank, and the President of the United States has pardoned you."

The warden touched a bell on his desk and an assistant came in.

"Take this man to the clothing-room and have him fitted out with a good suit," said the warden.

When Sanders and the assistant had gone, Warden Rockwell went to an adjoining room, where a special officer from Washington stood near the door.

"Did you get a good look at him, Leggett?"

"Yes," said the officer, "but if I'm going to shadow him, I'd like to see him again after he has changed his clothes."

"Certainly, I'll arrange that. What instructions have you had?"

"None, except that I am to shadow a man. You were to tell me the rest."

"Well," said the warden, "this fellow is Ed Sanders, who robbed the Cumberland Bank in Washington last fall and got away with over \$350,000 in money and bonds. None of the plunder was ever found, and it is believed Sanders has it hidden somewhere. The bank people got a pardon for him, believing he would go to the place where the plunder is hidden, and that they would find it in this way."

"I understand. Then what you said to him about the proof that he did not rob the bank was—"

"Simply to keep him from suspecting the real purpose of his pardon."

"I see."

"You must not let him get out of your sight for a moment. He might have the money where he could put his hand right on it."

"If he gets it I will know it," said the special officer.

"Have they any idea where the money is hidden?"

"It must be either in or very near Washington. He wasn't far away from there between the time of the robbery and the time he was arrested. He was suspected and watched. The money was probably hidden on the night of the robbery and has not been moved since."

"Some pal could have taken it away."

"Yes, but Sanders always works alone. That was one reason why he was suspected in the first place, for the robbery seemed to have been committed by one man. It looked like a one-man job."

"The bank must have had a strong pull at the White House to get a pardon for him."

"Pull! I should say so. Why, Senator Sanford is one of the directors of the bank."

"Oho!"

"Mr. Bowton is the man you will deal with. He is the president of the bank. He will help you in any way he can, and you are to report Sanders' movements to him as often as seems necessary."

"Suppose Sanders should lead me to the money at once!"

"Get the money."

"Shall I arrest him?"

"Not unless you have to. They don't want Sanders. They want the money."

"What if he doesn't go to Washington?"

"Follow him wherever he goes and report by telegraph to Mr. Bowton."

"Pretty tough job, warden."

"Oh, I guess not. He can't go far unless he gets more money than he will have when he leaves here. I think he will go straight to Washington. If he does he will reach there with less than two dollars in his pocket. That won't last long. He will have to have more very soon, and I shouldn't be surprised if he tried to tap the bank plunder before to-morrow morning."

"If he does, I will tap him," said Leggett, putting his hand on the pocket where he carried his little leather billy.

"Good! How many assistants have you?"

"Two."

"Where are they?"

"One is outside. The other is at the railroad station."

In an hour Ed Sanders walked out of the prison and turned down the road toward the railroad station.

A peddler coming the other way asked him where Marcus Anson lived. Sanders said he didn't know.

A farmer on horseback, just behind Sanders, heard the peddler's question and said:

"Mark Anson? Why, man alive, you're a-goin' jest the wrong way to find his house. Turn right around and go back whur ye come from. He lives up over acrost the railroad track yender."

So the peddler turned around and trudged slowly with his big pack on his back, following Sanders toward the railroad track.

The farmer hit his old mare with the end of the halter rope and galloped on ahead of Sanders. He was soon out of sight.

When Sanders reached the track two railroad men were taking measurements with a tape-line. Sanders turned down toward the station. The two men took measurements along the track in the same direction.

The peddler did not turn toward the station. He went on across the track and over a hill beyond.

There he found the farmer's old mare tied to the fence. In another moment he was mounted on her and hurrying down a back road to beat the train to the next station, three miles away.

The arrangements for shadowing Sanders had been carefully made. The farmer had turned him over to the peddler, and the peddler had turned him over to the railroad men. He had not made a movement that had not been seen by at least one pair of watchful eyes.

Sanders bought a ticket for Washington and received \$1.60 change. This was all the money he had when he boarded the train, and Leggett knew it.

Sanders took a seat in the smoking-car. The two railroad men sat across the aisle from him, making figures and discussing questions about ties and rails and right of way.

At the next station a passenger came aboard. Nobody would have recognized him as the peddler.

The two railroad men threw away their cigars and went back into another car. The new passenger settled down into their seat, pulled his hat over his eyes, and seemed to go to sleep.

When the train reached Washington, this sleepy looking passenger could have sworn that Sanders had not talked with anybody, and that nobody had given anything to him.

This was about noon.

Sanders went to a cheap restaurant and bought a lunch which cost twenty cents. Then he bought three cigars for a quarter. This left him with \$1.15.

He lighted one of the cigars and strolled over to the Mall, where he sat down under a big tree and smoked all his cigars.

He had not yet spoken to a person who knew him.

"He's killing time," said Leggett to one of his assistants.

"Yes; he's waiting for dark."

At about five o'clock Sanders got up and started toward Pennsylvania avenue. It was still daylight.

He went directly to Savoni's, the most fashionable restaurant in Washington.

The eyes of the officers were on him every instant.

He took a seat in the public room and ordered his dinner.

Leggett made a mental calculation and said:

"He has ordered more than he can pay for."

Then Sanders called for a quart of wine—\$2 more.

He seemed to be perfectly careless about the price of things.

"Probably has credit here," said Leggett.

"But he has not spoken to anybody. Nobody seems to know him," answered the other officer.

"That's so. I don't understand it. We must watch him very closely."

There was never an instant during the meal when one or the other of the officers was not looking at their man.

When Sanders had sipped his wine and coffee and lighted his fine imported cigar, his bill amounted to \$4.20.

Leggett was positive he had had but \$1.15 in his pocket.

Sanders tapped on his plate with his fork.

The colored waiter came.

"Check," said Sanders.

The waiter filled out the check and handed it to him.

"Four-twenty, sah."

Sanders looked at it a moment.

The two officers watched him eagerly. Both wondered what he would do.

At last Sanders seemed to be satisfied that the check was right.

He put his hand into his vest-pocket: took out a bill, and handed it to the waiter.

The waiter bowed and hurried away to the cashier's desk.

"Well, I swear!" muttered Leggett. "I'd like to know how he can get \$4.20 out of a one-dollar bill!"

In a moment the waiter returned with a handful of money and counted it out to Sanders:

"Four, twenty—four twenty-five—fifty—five dollars—ten—twenty—forty—fifty dollars, sah."

Sanders handed a quarter to the waiter, got up, kicked down his trousers, and walked out with the air of a satisfied man.

"Well!" said Leggett. "That beats me."

"Me, too," echoed his assistant.

Where did that fifty-dollar bill come from? That was the question in their minds.

CHAPTER II.

THIS CASE NEEDS A BETTER MAN.

Leggett left his two assistants to watch Sanders while he hurried away to report to Mr. Bowton.

He found the bank president at home. Mr. Hepperson, the cashier, and Mr. Taylor, his assistant, were there.

"May I see you alone, Mr. Bowton?" Leggett asked.

"You may say anything you wish right here," said Mr. Bowton.

"Mr. Hepperson and Mr. Taylor understand the case as well as I do. We are working on it together."

The officer reported everything that had been done during the day.

When he told that Sanders had paid for his dinner with a fifty-dollar bill, Mr. Bowton and his assistants looked at each other in surprise.

"What can that mean?" asked Mr. Bowton.

"It means that Sanders has got at the hidden money without being seen," said Mr. Hepperson.

"That is impossible," said Leggett. "He has not been out of our sight for an instant. One of my men examined the place where he sat under the tree on the Mall, and there was certainly no other place where he could have got the money."

"But he got it somewhere," said Mr. Bowton.

"Not after he left the prison," said Leggett; "I'll swear to that."

"It is very strange," said Mr. Bowton. "I have known Warden Rockwell for years, and I am perfectly sure that he would not play us false."

Mr. Bowton told Leggett to continue his watch upon Sanders.

"Engage as many men as you require, but don't let him out of your sight. If he leaves Washington, follow him and report frequently to me by wire."

Leggett left the house.

"I haven't much confidence in these Washington officers," said Mr. Bowton.

"I haven't any," said Mr. Taylor. "Like enough they have a perfect understanding with Sanders by this time."

"No; I don't believe that. I think they are honest, but I don't think they are smart enough to compete with such a man as Sanders."

"What do you propose to do?" asked Mr. Hepperson.

"I am going to New York."

"What for?"

"To see Nick Carter," said Mr. Bowton. "We ought to have put the case in his hands in the first place."

"I don't believe it will do any good. I don't think we shall ever get our money."

"Well, if there's a detective in the world who can get it for us, Nick Carter is the man."

"I don't believe anybody can do it," said Mr. Taylor.

"Well, it is worth the trial."

After Mr. Hepperson and Mr. Taylor had gone, Mr. Bowton sat in his library thinking.

Suddenly he jumped up, snatched his hat from the rack, and hurried down to Savoni's. Mr. Savoni was an old acquaintance and a stockholder in the bank. Mr. Bowton knew he could trust him.

"May I speak confidentially to you?" said Mr. Bowton, as he entered Mr. Savoni's private office.

"Of course you may."

"A man dined here an hour ago and paid for his dinner with a fifty-dollar bill. May I see that bill?"

Mr. Savoni was about to call his cashier, but Mr. Bowton stopped him.

"Can't you get the bill yourself? I would rather not have even your cashier know that I wish to see it."

"I can fix that."

Mr. Savoni stepped to the cashier's desk.

"How much cash have you in the drawer?" he asked.

The cashier began to count it.

There was but one fifty-dollar bill.

Mr. Savoni took it and looked at it critically, as if he doubted whether it was good.

"I think it is all right," said the cashier.

"Where did you get it?"

"A stranger just paid it in."

"I guess it is good," said Mr. Savoni, putting the bill into his pocket. "Charge it to me."

In the private office Mr. Bowton looked closely at the bill. It was an old one.

"Are you sure this is the one?"

"It was the only one in the drawer."

"Will you sell it to me, Mr. Savoni?"

"Certainly."

Mr. Bowton bought the bill and took it away with him. The next morning Leggett called before Mr. Bowton had breakfasted.

He had nothing of importance to report.

Sanders had taken a cheap room at the American House and had gone to bed early. He had not left the room until long after daylight.

Mr. Bowton took the first train for New York, and that afternoon was shown into Nick Carter's reception-room.

When he had briefly outlined the case to the great detective, he asked:

"Can you come to Washington to-night, Mr. Carter?"

Nick is much more apt to ask questions than to answer them.

"What were the circumstances of the robbery?" he asked.

"On the 13th of last September," said Mr. Bowton, "when our cashier went to open the vault door, he found that it had been locked open instead of shut."

"Was the door open?"

"No; it was shut, but the bolts were thrown back instead of forward."

"Who locks that door?"

"Mr. Hepperson, the cashier, usually does it himself, but Mr. Taylor, the assistant cashier, had done it the night before."

"Yes; go on."

"I heard Mr. Hepperson scolding Mr. Taylor for his carelessness and stepped out to see what was the matter. I drew the vault door open and found that the lock inside had been blown to pieces."

"How?"

"I don't know. Some explosive had been used. The inside of the door was badly smoked up, and pieces of the lock lay on the floor."

"How was the explosive introduced?"

"That is what we do not know. The police said it was some new method unknown to them."

"The inner safe, containing the money, was opened in the same way, I suppose," said Nick.

"Yes."

"Did Mr. Taylor lock that also the night before?"

"No; Mr. Hepperson locked that himself."

"They were both inside locks, were they?"

"Yes."

"And both broken in the same manner?"

"They seemed to be."

"Yet nobody knows how it was done?"

"Nobody."

"I do."

"You do?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"It is a new method, as you say. I suppose it was never done before in Washington. I will explain it to you later. I will take your case, Mr. Bowton."

"Good! We can catch a train for Washington in about an hour."

"Excuse me a moment," said Nick, as he left the room.

When he returned he said:

"Now about Sanders! Was it Leggett's idea to have him pardoned?"

"No; it was mine. Or, rather, it was suggested to me by a newspaper clipping. Senator Sanford, who is one of our directors, gave it to me. His niece, Mrs. Marquhar, cut it from a San Francisco paper."

"You are convinced that Sanders had less than two dollars when he reached Washington?"

"Yes."

"And he paid for his dinner that night with a fifty-dollar bill?"

"Yes; here is the bill."

Nick glanced at the bill which Mr. Bowton handed to him, and put it into his pocket.

"Very well, Mr. Bowton. Now please listen. Go back to Washington to-night."

"Yes."

"At noon to-morrow dismiss Leggett and his assistants."

"You will be there then?"

"No. This is Wednesday. I shall be there a week from to-day."

"But, Mr. Carter, Sanders will certainly get away with the money before that time."

"Mr. Bowton, if I am going to conduct the case, I shall have to conduct it in my own way."

"Certainly. I expect that."

"Then please do as I say."

"I will."

"Does anybody know that you have come to see me?"

"Nobody but Mr. Hepperson and Mr. Taylor."

"Tell them I could not come. I prefer to have nobody know that I am on the case."

"Very well."

As Mr. Bowton rose to go, he asked:

"Mr. Carter, have you any hope of recovering the money?"

"If I had not I should not care to take the case, Mr. Bowton."

On the following Wednesday an elderly gentleman with white hair and side-whiskers called at the bank and sent his card in to Mr. Bowton. It read:

MR. ALEXANDER HARDY.

Mr. Hardy was shown into Mr. Bowton's private office.

"Mr. Bowton," said he, "I wish to open an account with your bank."

"The cashier attends to such matters," said Mr. Bowton. "You will find him outside."

"But I wish you to identify me."

"I can't do that, sir. I never saw you before."

"Then you couldn't indorse my check?"

"Not if I know myself."

"But if you know me you will."

Mr. Alexander Hardy took off his wig and whiskers.

"Nick Carter!"

"At your service, Mr. Bowton."

After he had recovered from his surprise, the banker asked:

"Do you really wish to open an account?"

"Yes, as Alexander Hardy."

Nick put on his wig and whiskers again.

Mr. Hepperson was called in and introduced to Mr. Hardy.

Nick handed a roll of money to Mr. Hepperson, who, counted and sorted it.

There were some pretty badly worn bills in the lot. Mr. Hepperson separated these from the rest.

"I notice," said Nick, "that all the paper money used in Washington is new."

"Yes," said Mr. Hepperson; "the treasury is so close at hand that we always turn in worn money and get new bills for it."

"Such as that, for instance?" said Nick, pointing to the pile of old bills that Mr. Hepperson had separated from the rest.

"Yes; we send all such bills over to the treasury."

"I suppose you keep it until you get a quantity."

"No; we send over what we have every day. Strangers bring a good deal of worn money to town and we always retire it as soon as possible."

When the business of opening the account was done and Mr. Hepperson had gone, Mr. Bowton said:

"Mr. Carter, I have something to explain to you."

"I know it."

"Know what?"

"That you didn't dismiss Leggett and his men."

"I don't see how you found it out, but it is true. I had a good reason for keeping them at work, though. There was something you didn't know about."

"What was that?"

"The day after I came back from New York, Leggett reported to me that he had seen a suspicious-looking character with Sanders."

"Indeed?"

"Yes; and I thought you would want to know all you could about him."

"So you told Leggett to shadow him?"

"Yes; and find out who he was, if possible."

"Did he find out?"

"No; he shadowed him a little while, and somehow lost all track of him. He says the fellow went out of sight as completely as if he had dissolved into air."

"And hasn't been seen since?"

"No. But since then Leggett has seen two others."

"Making three in all."

"Yes."

"A very suspicious circumstance," said Nick.

"Yes; Leggett thought so, and so did I."

"Would you recognize those men if you saw them?"

"I think I would. Leggett described them very closely to me."

Nick stepped to the back window.

"Is that one of them?" he asked, pointing to an Irishman lighting his pipe in the alley behind the bank.

"As I live, it is," said Mr. Bowton, in amazement.

The Irishman saw them looking at him and hastily slipped around the corner of a building.

"What does this mean, Mr. Carter? Do you understand it?"

Nick drew Mr. Bowton to the side window.

"Is that another of them?" he asked, pointing at a man with a heavy black beard just coming out of a hallway on the side street.

"Upon my word!" exclaimed Mr. Bowton. "This is wonderful."

"He's Number Two, is he?"

"Yes."

The man disappeared in another hallway.

"Mr. Carter, when did you reach Washington?"

"Half an hour ago."

"And you already know two of these men. I can't see through it."

"It's perfectly simple."

"Are they pals of Sanders?"

"We shall know more about that after a while."

The office-boy brought in a card bearing this inscription:

J. LLEWELLAN GREGGORY.

"What does he want?" asked Mr. Bowton.

"Wants to see you," said the boy.

"Tell him I am engaged. Have Mr. Hepperson find out what he wants."

The boy came back in a moment.

"He won't see anybody but you, Mr. Bowton, and he says it's very important."

"Tell him I will be out in a moment," said Mr. Bowton.

The boy disappeared.

"Better let him come in," said Nick; "I can go out if necessary."

Nick opened the door and in walked Mr. Gregory, a young dude with a down mustache, sucking the immense silver head of his cane.

"Is this the third one?" said Nick, as he closed the door.

Mr. Bowton dropped back in his chair, completely bewildered.

"Mr. Carter, you are a wizard," he said.

"No, I'm not. Sit down, Chick. I want Mr. Bowton to get acquainted with you."

"And this is your famous assistant, Mr. Carter?"

"Yes; this is Chick."

"And the black-bearded man was——"

"Chick."

"And the Irishman?"

"Who was the Irishman, Chick?"

"Begob, sor, Oi'm afeard that was Chick, too."

"And you've been here all this time?" exclaimed the bank president.

"I have," responded Chick. "The chief got me started for this city before you were out of his house."

CHAPTER III.

THE RESTAURANT PUZZLE SOLVED.

"I am an ass," said Mr. Bowton.

"No; you are a banker," Nick answered.

"I am not a detective, that is sure. But you have taught me a lesson which I shall not forget. After this I will carry out your instructions to the letter."

"Then I think we shall have no trouble. Now we can get to work. Mrs. Elton has a reception to-night."

"Yes."

"You will attend?"

"I shall."

"Will you send word asking her if you may bring Mr. Hardy, a friend of yours?"

Mr. Bowton sent a note at once, and Mrs. Elton's answer soon came. She said she would be delighted to meet any friend of Mr. Bowton.

"I will call at your house at nine o'clock, Mr. Bowton," said Nick.

At half-past five that afternoon two foreign-looking gentlemen entered Savoni's restaurant, and took seats at a table near one of the westerly windows.

One of them had a heavy military mustache. The other wore a Van Dyke beard, and had a neat green patch over his left eye.

They conversed in French.

In a few minutes Ed Sanders came in and took his customary seat at a small table in the darkest corner.

A colored waiter took his order and brought him a good dinner.

After Sanders had eaten it and lighted a good cigar, he called for his check. The waiter made it out and handed it to him, saying:

"Two-eighty, sah."

Sanders drew a bill from his vest pocket.

Just as he did so the Frenchman with the mustache reached across the table for a match. The rays of the sun coming in at the window were reflected from a peculiar ring on his finger, and threw a strong light upon the bill in Sanders' hand.

It was but a flash, such as a mirror makes when it is moved in the sunlight, but it was enough, for at just that moment the other Frenchman was apparently looking through the window with one eye, and, as a matter of fact, watching Sanders very closely from under the green patch with the other.

"Did you catch it, Nick?" the Frenchman with the queer ring signaled to his companion.

"Yes, Chick," the other signaled back, "it was a one-dollar bill."

From behind the green patch Nick watched the waiter with his left eye, while his right one seemed to be looking in another direction.

The waiter slipped the one-dollar bill which Sanders had given him out of sight, and took from his palm a fifty-dollar bill, which had been there all the time.

He gave the fifty-dollar bill to the cashier and carried the change, forty-seven dollars and twenty cents, to Sanders.

Sanders gave the twenty cents to the waiter and left the room.

Nick took his check and Chick's to the cashier's desk and laid down a one-hundred-dollar bill.

"Is that the smallest you have?" asked the cashier.

"It is," said Nick, in broken English.

"Everybody has big bills to-day," said the cashier, counting out the change.

There was a fifty-dollar bill in it.

Nick looked at it carefully.

"This is badly worn," said he. "Could you give me a better one?"

"It is the only one I have. It is perfectly good. I just took it myself."

Nick put the bill into his pocket and walked away.

"Now for the bicycles," he said, when he and Chick were outside.

At seven o'clock the night force of waiters came on duty at Savoni's, and Tom Jackson, who had waited on Sanders at dinner, was relieved.

In a few minutes he mounted a bicycle and rode away toward the Washington Monument.

But he did not go to the monument. He turned into a dark street near the old Van Ness house and rode up and down this deserted street several times.

Presently a woman came speeding on a wheel from the monument grounds.

She spun past Jackson and said:

"Tom."

"Yes."

In an instant the woman was beyond speaking distance. She dropped something beside the road. It was white, like paper. The woman was out of sight in a moment.

The waiter started speedily toward it.

Just then another woman came dashing on a wheel out of the darkness behind Jackson.

She was a very large and strong woman, and she was flying along on her wheel as if riding on the back of a cyclone.

Behind her was a man in full chase.

There was a crash of wheels, and Tom Jackson went flying into the gutter with the woman and both bicycles sprawling upon him.

He lay utterly helpless. The woman had fallen right across his face. He could neither move nor see, and he couldn't breathe very well.

He struggled hard to get away, but the skirts were tangled about him, and the woman seemed to weigh a ton. Both were so mixed up in their bicycles that it looked as if they never would get out without help.

The man who had followed this woman jumped off his wheel and snatched up the little white package that the first woman had dropped.

This man was Nick Carter.

While Jackson and the second woman were trying to get out of their tangle, Nick hastily unfolded the package and found it contained a fifty-dollar bill and a brief note.

The note read:

"I must see you to-night. I am going to the Elton reception. Come to the conservatory window at eleven o'clock and hand me a note telling me where you will meet me after the reception. (Signed.) CHLOE."

Nick rolled the money in the note and put the package beside the road, where he had found it. All this occupied about forty seconds. When it had been done, Jackson was still lying blinded and helpless under the woman's body. He was getting angry, and the smothered words that came from his lips were beginning to sound like profanity.

Nick helped the woman to rise.

"Are you hurt, madame?" he asked.

"Oh, I don't know, sir," she gasped. "I thought I was half-killed."

He put her on her feet and soon she said she was all right.

"Can you get on your wheel?"

"Oh, yes, sir, thank you. I was only frightened. I am not hurt."

They rode away together, and when they were out of Jackson's hearing, Nick said:

"I thought you had broken your neck, sure enough, that time, Chick."

"I was afraid I had broken the ducky's," said Chick.

Tom Jackson found the little package where it had been dropped for him, so he had no reason to think the collision was not an accident.

Promptly at nine o'clock Nick jumped from a cab in front of Mr. Bowton's house.

Mr. Bowton met him at the door.

"You may as well dismiss your cab," said the banker.

"My carriage is all ready."

"Where?"

"In the stable."

"Let it stay there a while."

"Mr. Bowton," continued Nick, "can you open the bank vault?"

"Yes."

"And the inner safe?"

"Yes."

"Now?"

"If you wish."

"Then come along."

They entered the cab, hurried to the bank, and were soon inside the vault.

"You were the first one to enter the vault after the robbery, Mr. Bowton?"

"Yes."

"Please tell me just how it looked in here."

"Well, the lock on this outer door was broken in this manner."

Mr. Bowton showed where the break was.

"It was a lock just like this?"

"Yes."

"Go ahead."

"The broken pieces lay here where they had fallen, and all this part of the door was smoked up."

"Any smoke on the outside of the door?"

"Yes; a little, close around the combination knob. But very little, though; hardly enough to blister the paint. The explosive seemed to have spent its force on the lock inside."

"What has been done to the vault since the robbery?"

"Nothing but to put a new lock on the door."

During this conversation Nick was looking over the interior of the vault very carefully.

A number of tin cash-boxes stood on a shelf at the back. Some of these had names painted on them, and some were marked by tags tied to the handles.

Nick looked at a few of the tags.

"Those are merely private boxes," said Mr. Bowton.

"They belong to stockholders and friends of the bank. We let them put them here for safe-keeping."

"Were they all here at the time of the robbery?"

"Yes."

"And none of them were disturbed?"

"No; they contain nothing but private papers, of no value to anybody but their owners."

"Now about the safe. Will you please open that?"

Mr. Bowton knelt before the safe.

He was slow in opening the door.

Nick meanwhile was looking over the walls, the door, the boxes, and everything inside the vault.

Somebody rapped vigorously on the glass of the front door of the bank.

"What's that?" said Mr. Bowton.

"You'd better go and see," said Nick.

Mr. Bowton stepped to the front door.

It was the cab driver.

He motioned to Mr. Bowton to open the door.

"Is it all right to let your driver in?" asked Mr. Bowton.

"Yes; see what he wants."

Mr. Bowton opened the door.

"Will I have time to drive down to the corner and get a drink?" asked the driver. "I won't go if you're going to want me right away, but if you don't, you know, I thought I'd run over and get a bracer."

"Tell him to go on," Nick called from the vault; "but have him hurry back."

Mr. Bowton gave the message to the driver, locked the front door, and came back to the vault.

When the safe was opened Nick examined the inside of it, while Mr. Bowton explained the condition it was in on the morning after the robbery.

"Has it been painted?" Nick asked.

"The inside of the door has."

"Nothing else?"

"No."

"And the broken pieces of lock—where were they?"

"Lying around here," said Mr. Bowton, pointing out the place.

"That will do, I believe. Now put out the light."

Mr. Bowton turned off the gas in the vault and started to go out.

"Hold on," said Nick; "stand right there. Keep your eye on that window a minute and you will see something."

Mr. Bowton stood in the dark and fixed his gaze on a side window of the bank.

Presently he saw a negro's face close outside the pane. The fellow was looking very intently.

"Do you know who that is?" Nick asked.

"No; I never saw him before."

"Sure?"

"Sure."

"I guess you have."

"Who is it? Chick?"

"No; Ed Sanders."

"How do you know that?"
 "My driver told me."
 "When?"
 "When you opened the door for him."
 "How could he have told you anything? I heard all he said."
 "But you didn't know all it meant."
 "Who is your driver?"
 "Chick."
 "And is he here now?"
 "Watching Sanders."
 "Mr. Carter, you know everything. Is Sanders going to try to rob the bank again?"
 "Not to-night."

CHAPTER IV.

MRS. ELTON'S RECEPTION.

When Nick and Mr. Bowton came out of the bank, Chick was nowhere in sight.

The cab stood near a saloon on the corner below.

"Get in, Mr. Bowton," said Nick. "Chick is off on business. I'll have to drive you to Mrs. Elton's."

He slipped on the big coachman's overcoat, which Chick had left behind, and mounted the box.

When they reached Mrs. Elton's, it was only necessary to slip the coat off again, and to put the horse in a servant's care.

It was not yet ten o'clock when Mr. Bowton introduced his friend, Mr. Hardy, to Mrs. Elton, and she, in turn, introduced him to many of her guests.

Among them were Senator Sanford and Mrs. Marquhar, his niece, the Savonis, the Gilsons, the Jessups, and, in fact, nearly all of those who formed what Washington society people called "the Cumberland Bank set," including Mr. Hepperson and Mr. Taylor, whom Mr. Hardy had met at the bank.

After the introductions, Nick worked his way through the crowd, stopping for a pleasant word here and there, until he found himself standing beside Senator Sanford.

The Senator was gazing admiringly at his niece, who looked very beautiful as she stood gracefully leaning against the mantel, where the mellow light fell richly upon her remarkable hair.

"Mrs. Marquhar is a charming woman, Senator," said Nick.

"Isn't she?" answered the old Senator, proudly.

"What wonderful hair!"

"It is wonderful, indeed. I have never seen anything like it."

"You ought to be very proud of her."

"I am. She is the only near relative I have, and she is very dear to me."

"A sister's daughter?"

"No; a brother's. I have never had a sister."

"Mrs. Marquhar is a Californian, I understand."

"Yes; and a splendid example of the true Western woman."

"In what way?"

"She is the pluckiest woman I ever knew. She has had sorrows and trials enough to break down all but one woman in a million."

"Indeed? It must be an interesting story."

"It is a long one."

"Nevertheless, I should like to hear it," said Nick.

"What do you say to a cigar on the lawn?"

The Senator was an inveterate smoker. He needed only one invitation of that kind.

The two men walked out and lighted their cigars.

"My only brother went to California in 1849," said the Senator, "and remained there until his death. In 1855 he was married, and a few years later little Helen, now Mrs. Marquhar, was born. My brother was completely wrapped up in his little daughter. His letters to me were full of her."

"There were no photographs out there in those days,

and if there had been my brother could hardly have afforded to get one at the price it would have cost in that country.

"But he used to describe his little Helen to me and send me locks of her hair, saying that there never was anything so odd or so beautiful in all the world before."

"Of course I could see by the peculiar color that her hair must be beautiful, but I took much that my brother said with a good deal of allowance. Parents are pretty sure to think well of their own children."

"My brother died in 1862. I was in the army at the time, and I must confess that the busy excitement of war caused me to neglect my duty to my brother's widow and orphan. I did write to them once or twice, but that was all, and I soon lost track of them."

"I have since learned that my brother's widow married again and that her husband abused her and her daughter shamefully. Then he eloped with a variety actress and left them penniless."

"The shock and shame of it broke down the mother's health, and the daughter, a mere girl, had to earn bread for both. Oh, sir, it is a pitiful story."

"Is her mother living now?"

"No, sir; she died several years ago. Then the daughter married Mr. Marquhar. He was kind to her, but he died, leaving her nothing but a lot of debts. These she has succeeded in paying off."

"Her husband's debts?"

"Yes. Of course she could not be compelled to pay them, but she loved her husband and she says it was a pleasure to pay his debts."

"Very noble," said Nick; "but I presume her good uncle has given her a lift now and then."

"No, sir; not a penny. She won't let me. I never saw such independence. When she came to Washington six months ago, I wanted her to live with me as my own daughter, but she would not do so."

"I secured a temporary place for her in the Treasury Department, intending to put her into a better place very soon, but she said she preferred to stay there."

"Her salary must be small."

"Only one thousand dollars a year."

"Does she live on that?"

"Yes; and dresses well, as you see."

"You don't help her at all financially?"

"She won't let me. I am not a rich man, but I would gladly divide what I have with her. I have no one else."

"She is a remarkable woman."

"She is a splendid woman, perfectly splendid. Ah, what a wife for some good man! I wish she and Mr. Hepperson could join hands. He's a capital fellow—a quiet, domestic sort of man, who would make a woman happy; and I am quite sure he admires my niece."

Nick took hold of Senator Sanford's arm.

"Look out for the dog!" said he.

The huge creature lay on the grass under a tree in the side yard where they were walking.

"Ah," said the Senator, "that is Mrs. Elton's St. Bernard. He is perfectly harmless."

Senator Sanford stooped down and patted the animal's great head.

The two men entered the house by the side door and were soon separated in the throng.

Mrs. Marquhar was standing near the conservatory door when Nick approached her.

"Did your ears burn, Mrs. Marquhar? I have just been out for a smoke with Senator Sanford, and he said a great many nice things about you."

"He is a dear good uncle," she answered. "He says much more of me than I deserve."

"He doesn't think he can say enough."

Mrs. Marquhar smiled sweetly.

"How very close it is to-night!" she cried. "Won't you step into the conservatory where I can stand by the window, Mr. Hardy?"

"With pleasure. I will fetch a chair."

"No, no; I prefer to sit right here," and she sat down on the sill of an open window which looked out on the dark side ground.

Nick stood facing her. It was very dark outside. He

did not even see the huge dog get up from the grass, walk slowly to the small porch, and lie down close by the window in which Mrs. Marquhar sat.

Nor did he see the man who presently came creeping around the rear corner of the house, keeping close to the wall.

The man had a small piece of folded paper in his hand.

Mrs. Marquhar's hand was hanging carelessly down in the dark outside the window-sill.

The man stopped beneath it and reached up the bit of paper.

It was taken from his hand.

He thought Mrs. Marquhar took it.

The dog uttered a low growl. The man hurried back around the corner of the house.

"Bruno, what do you mean, sir?" said Mrs. Marquhar, looking out. "Don't you growl at me, sir. Go away! Go away, Bruno! That's no place for you."

The dog got up and moved off.

Queer dog, that! He didn't go far on four legs.

Pretty soon he got up, and walked on two.

A human hand appeared holding the note, and human eyes—Chick's eyes—read these words:

"I will wait for you under the big tree in the corner."

Chick laid off his dogskin disguise, which had been bought from a dealer in stuffed animals. Then he skulked around the corner of the house, just as the other man had done.

Mrs. Marquhar still sat in the window, talking sweetly to Nick.

Her hand hung down as before.

Chick reached up and put the note into it. Her fingers closed over it.

"I am quite cool now," she said, rising from the window-sill. "I am afraid to sit there any longer."

"It is dangerous to sit in such a draft, I think."

Nick gave her his arm and led her, smiling, into the drawing-room.

CHAPTER V.

TWO VIEWS OF MRS. MARQUHAR.

Mr. Hepperson escorted Mrs. Marquhar home from the reception. It was a pleasant night and they walked.

"Mrs. Marquhar," said he, "you are the strangest woman I ever knew."

"Am I? What is so strange about me?"

"Why do you continue in office? Why do you work so hard for so little when it is not necessary?"

"But it is necessary. I must live."

"You do not have to work for a living."

"I suppose you would advise me to live with my uncle."

"No, I would not."

"Where else could I live without work?"

"Where else?"

"Yes; where else?"

"Why, with—with me. Mrs. Marquhar, I love you."

Mr. Hepperson had long wanted to say this, but had never dared to do so before.

He took her hand in his.

"Could you not learn to love me just a little?" he asked.

"I should have to love you more than a little before I could become your wife, Mr. Hepperson."

"May I not hope that in time you will learn to love me a great deal?"

"I will not say that is impossible, but such things take time."

"I will wait. It is worth waiting a life-time to win your love."

When they parted at the door, Mr. Hepperson went away hoping that the dearest wish of his life might come true.

Mrs. Marquhar had let him think so, for she believed he might yet be useful in carrying out her plans.

Half an hour after she had gone in at the front door, she went out at the back. Her face was blackened, and she wore a large yellow handkerchief about her head.

She walked hurriedly to the big tree in the dark corner of the Elton grounds.

Ed Sanders, disguised as a negro, was waiting for her.

So was Bruno.

This is what Bruno heard as he lay near the fence:

"Do you remember the agreement we made when I came to see you in prison?" asked Mrs. Marquhar.

"I do."

"I agreed to get a pardon for you, didn't I?"

"You did."

"And I got it, didn't I?"

"Yes."

"I agreed to furnish you with money after you got out, didn't I?"

"You did."

"And I have sent more than four hundred dollars to you, haven't I?"

"You have."

"Did I agree to do anything I haven't done?"

"No."

"Well, then, why don't you carry out your agreement with me?"

"I am carrying it out as fast as I can. What more can you ask?"

"You have been free more than a week and I haven't seen a penny of the bank money yet. When am I going to get my share?"

"I don't know. I told you it might take some time."

"What makes it take so much time?"

"Well, I was shadowed every minute until yesterday."

"Have they quit shadowing you now?"

"I think so, but I'm not sure. It wouldn't be safe to go near the bank money yet."

"Why can't you tell me where it is? They are not shadowing me. I could get it and we could be away from here before morning."

"Oh, no. That was not the agreement."

"You don't trust me, then?"

"Look here," said Sanders, "we might as well say what we mean. If I should tell you where that money is, that is the last I'd ever see of you or the money."

"I swear I will give you your share of it."

Sanders laughed.

"Don't swear. It ain't lady-like."

"You expect me to send money to you and trust you with it, yet you do not trust me."

"You're not trusting me, and you know it. You're merely investing a few hundred dollars of somebody else's money for the sake of getting a few hundred thousand of your own."

"I am trusting you, too; and, see here, Ed Sanders, if you play any tricks on me, I'll follow you to the end of the world."

Bruno saw something gleam in her hand.

"Oh, put up your gun," said Sanders. "It might go off and spoil everything. I'm worth a fortune to you alive, but I wouldn't be worth a shilling to you dead."

Mrs. Marquhar put away her pistol.

"I ought to have got the money before I let you out of prison," she said.

"You couldn't," he answered. "But what's the use of quarreling? We're in the deal together, and we might as well be friends."

"It makes me nervous to wait so long. I want to get my money and go away from here. How do we know but Tom Jackson will squeal on us?"

"Never you fret about Tom. I've got the drop on him. Besides, what does he know?"

"He knows I am furnishing money for you."

"What if he does? Hasn't a lady a right to give a gentleman a few hundred if she wants to?"

"And suppose somebody should take the trouble to ask where a lady on a salary of a thousand a year gets four hundred a week?"

"Sure enough, that might be an impolite question to ask of a lady. By the way, I don't happen to know where the money comes from myself."

"No; and you're not likely to, either."

"I suppose your uncle puts it up."

"What, Senator Sanford? Not a penny. He's as poor as a church mouse."

"He's a director of the bank."

"Yes; he has a few shares of stock, and they made him a director on account of his influence. You see it's handy for a bank to have a director who can get pardons and such things from the President."

"Getting funny, an't you? Maybe it's your other uncle who is putting up for you."

"What other uncle?"

"Uncle Sam."

"If you know how a department clerk can make Uncle Sam put up anything more than salary, I wish you'd tell me how to do it."

"Well, if you haven't found a way, there's no use of my looking for one."

"You might try your new explosive on the treasury vaults."

Sanders made no answer to this. He seemed to think it was not discreet to talk about explosives.

"Hepperson went home with you to-night."

"What's that to you?"

"Oh, nothing, only—"

"Only what?"

"Nothing."

"What are you driving at, Ed Sanders?"

"Oh, nothing. Of course he wouldn't put up a few hundred for you."

"Why should he?"

Sanders imitated Hepperson's voice and manner as he said:

"Could you not learn to love me just a little, Mrs. Marquhar?"

Then he imitated Mrs. Marquhar's voice, saying:

"I should have to love you more than a little before I could become your wife, Mr. Hepperson."

"Ed Sanders, did you follow us?"

"Oh, no; of course not. I wouldn't do such a thing. A little bird told me."

"If you think you can make anything by following me around, you're mistaken. You'd better attend to your own business."

"I know it. That's why I followed you."

"What business have you following me?"

"Oh, you know, I had to go along to see that no harm came to you. Hepperson might kidnap you, you know."

"See here, I didn't come here to listen to your poor jokes. I want to know why you followed me."

"Oh, I happened to be going in the same direction."

"No, you didn't; you followed us on purpose."

"What purpose?"

"I don't know, but you had some reason, I know that."

"Tell me where you get your money, and I'll tell you why I followed you."

"I won't do it."

"All right then; neither will I."

"Well don't then. Who cares?"

"When are you going to marry Hepperson?"

"None of your business."

"Yes; it is."

"How so? I'd like to know."

"Why, you are my business partner, you know—my silent partner."

"What's that got to do with Hepperson?"

"Maybe it's got a good deal to do with him."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean—"

"Sh!"

Mrs. Marquhar took hold of his arm and spoke low:

"Who's that?"

"Who's what?" Sanders whispered.

"That man."

"Where?"

"Over there."

"I don't see anybody."

"By the fence."

She drew Sanders out from behind the tree and turned him so that he looked toward the place where Chick lay.

"Do you see him?"

"Yes."

"He must have heard us."

"Of course he did."

"Has he been there all the time, do you suppose?"

"He couldn't have come since we did. We should have seen him."

"What shall we do?"

"Dead men tell no tales."

"Is it safe to kill him?"

"If he is one of Leggett's men, we are lost unless we do kill him."

Mrs. Marquhar took out her pistol and cocked it.

Sanders snatched it from her hand.

"Great Heaven!" said he, "do you want the whole town to come down on us?"

He drew a glittering knife with one hand and a pistol with the other.

With the pistol leveled at Chick, he said:

"If you move a hand, I'll blow your head off."

Still covering Chick with the pistol, Sanders walked toward him, holding his knife behind him.

Chick did not move.

Sanders advanced to within a few feet of him, and, suddenly raising his knife, sprang at him.

Quick as a flash Chick jumped aside and uttered a sharp yelp followed by a growl.

"It's Bruno," cried Mrs. Marquhar.

"Bruno is mighty lucky to be alive," said Sanders, as he got up and put away his weapons.

"I'm all unstrung," said Mrs. Marquhar, excitedly. "I can't talk any more to-night. I'm going home."

"When can I see you again? I've something more to say to you."

"Come here to-morrow night."

Sanders went one way and Mrs. Marquhar the other.

When they were gone, Chick went to a vacant stable in the next block and let the real Bruno out.

The dog sniffed a few times and started on a run for home.

CHAPTER VI.

WHAT BECOMES OF UNCLE SAM'S MONEY.

The next day Nick Carter, disguised as a countryman, fell in with a party of sight-seers who were being shown through the Treasury Building.

"Here, young man," said Nick, slipping a dollar into the guide's hand, "I want to ask a lot o' questions, an' I'm willin' to pay for the trouble I give you. I don't git to Washington every day, an' I want to see all I can of it now I'm here."

"Ask all the questions you like," said the guide. "I will answer them if I can."

So Nick asked about everything he saw, and the rest of the party merely listened to the answers.

When they came to the Redemption Division, Nick asked:

"What do they do here?"

"This is where they redeem old worn-out paper money."

"Redeem?"

"Yes; when anybody has an old dollar bill, for instance, he can send it here and get a new one for it."

"Can, hey? I never knew that before."

"Neither did I," said one of the other sight-seers.

"Oh, yes; the Government will always give you new money for old."

"I'd never think of sendin' an old bill to Washington," said Nick. "I'd pass it off on somebody. Do many folks send old money here? I never heard of anybody doin' it."

"It is generally sent in by banks," said the guide. "People pay it to storekeepers and such, and they put it into the banks. Then the banks send it here and get new money for it."

"Oh, ho! I see. Then what becomes of the old money?"

"I will show you."

They passed through into a long room where twelve men and women sat at tables counting piles of old, tattered bills.

Mrs. Marquhar was one of these, and Nick noticed that she did not seem to count as rapidly as some of the others.

"Green hand at it, an't she?" he whispered to the guide.

"She has been here only a few months. Some of the others have been here many years. That lady with the gray hair has counted this stuff for more than twenty-seven years and has made but three mistakes in all that time."

"It don't seem possible, does it?" said Nick to one of the sight-seers. "W'y, I'd make a dozen mistakes a day."

"That wouldn't do here," said the guide.

"Don't these people do anything but count old money?"

"That's all. They count it over after each other."

"What? You don't mean they all count the same money?"

"Yes. It is all counted twelve times in this section."

"What do they count it so many times for?"

"Well, one reason is that they have to be perfectly sure the count is right, and another reason," said the guide, lowering his voice, "is that it makes stealing impossible."

"How so? Couldn't one of them gals slip out a ten-dollar bill once in a while. There an't nobody watchin' 'em."

"Yes; but she would be caught at it immediately. Her count has to tally with the others."

"Couldn't two or three of 'em go snooks?"

"No; even if the whole twelve put up a job together they couldn't take a dollar without being caught at it."

"Why not?"

"Because this section has to receipt for all the money that comes to it, and has to take a receipt for all that it turns over to the next section. If it doesn't turn over as much as it has received, it shows there is something wrong in this section."

"S'posin' that gal there should slip out a ten-dollar bill. How would anybody know whether she or one of the others did it?"

"Each one gives a receipt for all the money turned over to her, and takes a receipt for all she turns over to the next one. If one receives five hundred dollars and turns over only four hundred and ninety dollars, of course she has taken out the other ten dollars."

"Well, there doesn't seem to be much chance for stealing."

"There is no chance at all. It is simply impossible—that is to say, it is impossible to steal and not be caught at it within twenty-four hours."

"An't there ever been any money stolen from here?"

"Not since they adopted the present system, twenty years ago."

"Has anybody tried it?"

"Oh, yes; several."

"Got caught, eh?"

"At once."

"Did they send 'em to jail?"

"No; the Government never sends such people to prison. They are merely dismissed quietly, and nobody ever knows why."

"What's that for?"

"Well, I suppose it is because the Treasury officials do not want it known that any dishonest people are ever employed here."

"Must have been a pretty smart man that thought out this system," said Nick.

"It was hundreds of smart men. It took years of study to stop every possible chance of theft."

"What becomes of the old money after it leaves here?"

"It is made up into packages and the bills are all cut in two by a machine. One half goes to the Secretary of the Treasury, and the other half to the United States Treasurer. The two halves never come together again. They are destroyed separately."

The guide took the party down to the macerating room where the halves of the old bills are finally put into a big vat and chopped in strong acid until they are nothing but colorless pulp.

"And that's the end of 'em," said Nick.

"That's the end."

"Much obleeged, young man."

Nick left the building.

In a few moments he entered the Cumberland Bank, disguised as Alexander Hardy.

He had a tin cash-box in his hand.

"I wonder if I may trouble you to keep this in your vault for me for a few days," he said.

"No trouble at all, Mr. Hardy," said the cashier. "Glad to do it."

"Is Mr. Bowton in his room?"

"Yes, sir."

"Busy?"

"I guess not very."

"I merely wish to say good-morning and thank him for a very pleasant evening at Mrs. Elton's. Delightful lady, isn't she?"

"She is, indeed."

"And that Mrs. Marquhar is perfectly charming. Egad, if I were your of age, or Mr. Taylor's, she wouldn't be a widow long if I could help it."

Mr. Hepperson blushed like a schoolboy.

"Did I hear my name taken in vain?" asked Mr. Taylor, looking up from a column of figures.

"I was only saying that if I were of your age I wouldn't let such a woman as Mrs. Marquhar remain a widow very long."

"I have all I can do to take care of myself," said Mr. Taylor. "I don't know what I'd do if I had to take care of a wife, too."

"Smoke fewer cigars, play less billiards, cut down on club dinners and theaters. Pshaw! A man on your salary could support two wives."

Nick passed through into Mr. Bowton's private office. He seemed to be feeling in excellent spirits.

"Mr. Bowton," said he, jocularly, "I have a great scheme for preventing all dishonesty in this world."

Mr. Bowton saw that Nick was not in a very serious mood.

"What's your scheme?" he asked.

"Simply to have intelligent money."

"Intelligent money?"

"Yes; money with eyes and ears and tongues."

"Rather a difficult task, I should say."

"Not very. Suppose the Government should stamp values on men instead of on paper, and issue them as money."

Mr. Bowton laughed at the absurdity of the idea.

"It would prevent a lot of stealing," said Nick.

"How so?"

"Why, if money could see and hear and talk, thieves would be afraid to steal it. I've often wished money could talk. It would save me a lot of work. Just think! Suppose that three hundred and fifty thousand dollars that was stolen from your safe could talk!"

Mr. Bowton knew Nick was driving at something, but could not guess what it was.

"Now, here's a bit of money that could tell an interesting story if it could talk."

Nick laid an old fifty-dollar bill before Mr. Bowton and asked:

"Did you ever see that before?"

"I don't know. Is it the one I gave you?"

"Yes. Have you ever seen it since?"

"Not that I know of."

"Well, it has been through your bank."

"How?"

"I'll tell you the whole story," said Nick. "Sanders paid for his dinner with it a week ago last Wednesday."

"Yes."

"You gave it to me."

"Yes."

"I deposited it in your bank."

"When you opened your account as Alexander Hardy?"

"Yes."

"Then how do you come to have it now?"

"Listen. Your bank sent it to the Treasury, didn't it?"

"Yes."

"Well, Ed Sanders paid for his dinner with it the next

day. That is, he went through the motions in the way I explained to you."

"Impossible!"

"Possible and true."

"Are you sure it is the same one?"

"It has my private mark upon it."

"How could it have got back to Sanders? If it ever got into the Treasury it certainly never could get out. It would have been destroyed before now."

"Of course you are sure it got into the Treasury, Mr. Bowton."

"I've come to think I can't be sure of anything. I only know Mr. Taylor started for the Treasury with it."

Mr. Bowton sat meditating for several seconds. Nick did not disturb his thoughts.

Finally the banker spoke:

"Mr. Carter, I cannot think Taylor is dishonest. I have known him since he was a baby, and——"

Mr. Bowton stopped short. An idea seemed to strike him all at once.

"Why," said he, "of course Taylor could not have taken it. He brought back new money in place of it. Why should he take an old worn-out bill, and put new money in its place?"

Nick said nothing. He was looking out of the window and enjoying Mr. Bowton's perplexity.

Mr. Bowton put his hand to his chin and fell into deep thought once more. When he spoke again he seemed to be talking more to himself than to Nick.

"But here is the bill," he said, as if that, at least, were evidence which could not be doubted. "If Taylor put it into the Treasury it couldn't be here. Yet here it is. How the devil did it get here?"

CHAPTER VII.

DOCTOR RADCLIFFE, THE DREAMER.

"Mr. Bowton," said Nick, "do you know the chief of the Redemption Division?"

"Mr. Daniels? Yes; very well."

"Could you ask him to step over here?"

"I think he would come."

"Tell him it is a matter of some importance to him."

Mr. Bowton sent word to Mr. Daniels.

When the messenger had started Nick put on his hat.

"If a man named Radcliffe comes before I return let him come in and keep him till you hear from me."

"Who is he?"

"A man who will make an important explanation. Let Mr. Daniels hear what he has to say. It will interest him."

Nick had not been gone many minutes when a shabby-looking man with long, tangled hair and beard, slouched up to the bank counter.

"Is the president in?" he asked, in a husky voice.

"Why?" asked Mr. Hepperson.

"I wish to see him."

"What for?"

"It is the president I wish to see. Are you the man?"

"No; but I don't think the president will see you."

"This is my name," said the man, as he handed over a dirty piece of crumpled paper, on which was scrawled:

"DR. BENJAMIN FRANKLIN RADCLIFFE,
"Professional Dreamer."

"Hand that to the president, sir, and tell him I come on an important mission from Dreamland."

Mr. Hepperson opened Mr. Bowton's door and put in his head.

"Are you at home to messengers from Dreamland?"

"What?"

"Do you wish to see a lunatic?"

"Who is it?"

"Here is his card."

Mr. Hepperson smiled as he handed the dirty bit of paper to Mr. Bowton.

"Radcliffe? Oh, yes; let him in."

As the professional dreamer sidled into the private office everybody in the outer room laughed.

"If the devil himself sent in his card, Mr. Bowton would say let him come in," said Mr. Taylor.

Mr. Daniels soon came and was shown in.

"Yes," said the shabby visitor, staring at Mr. Daniels with wild eyes; "yes; this is the man of my dream."

Mr. Daniels looked at Mr. Bowton in amazement.

"I am credibly informed," said Mr. Bowton, "that this man has something interesting to tell you, Mr. Daniels."

"Yes," said Doctor Radcliffe; "I am here to show you what I saw in a dream."

"Is this a joke, Mr. Bowton?" said Daniels.

"I think not," said Mr. Bowton, half dubiously. "If it is, I am not in it."

"Hearken to me," said Doctor Radcliffe, "and when I am done you may say it is a joke if you can."

"Blaze away," said Mr. Daniels, "but cut it short. I'm busy."

"Look, then! To-day, as I dreamed, I stood in the Treasury Building. There was money all around me—millions of dollars. And a voice said: 'Take what you require!'"

"Rot!" said Mr. Daniels. "I haven't time to listen to this nonsense."

"Patience! patience!" said the strange visitor, drawing from his pocket a package of fifty-dollar bills. They were all old ones.

Mr. Daniels became more interested now.

"But how to get the money without being detected," continued Doctor Radcliffe. "That was the question."

"Yes," said Mr. Daniels, dryly. "I should say it was."

"I found an answer," said the dreamer, solemnly. "Look!"

From the corner of one of the bills he tore a piece about an inch and a half square, and slipped the fragment into his pocket.

"Would the Treasury redeem that bill with this piece torn out?" he asked.

"Certainly," said Mr. Daniels.

"So you said in the dream, for you were there. Now see what more I did."

From another bill the man tore another piece of about the same size, not from the corner, but from the top half of the bill and an inch and a half from the end. Then he showed this bill to Mr. Daniels.

"And the Treasury would redeem that with this small piece torn out?"

"Yes."

One after another the dreamer took up fourteen bills and tore a piece from each, but never from the same part of any two.

When he had torn pieces from them all and put the small bits into his pocket, he asked:

"The Treasury would give me fifty dollars for each of these bills, would it not?"

"Of course," said Mr. Daniels.

"So you said in my dream."

Then he took the fourteen small pieces from his pocket, laid them on the table, trimmed their edges with a sharp knife, and pasted them lightly together. They made one whole bill!

Mr. Daniels watched him with intense interest.

"And the Treasury would redeem this one, too?" Doctor Radcliffe asked.

Mr. Daniels rubbed his eyes as if he was not sure whether he himself was awake or dreaming.

"My God!" he said, "Mr. Bowton, this man has made fifteen good bills out of fourteen."

Mr. Bowton stood bewildered.

"But hold! I did more than that," said the dreamer.

"More than that?"

"Yes. Watch!"

Doctor Radcliffe took a fairly whole bill from his remaining package and put in place of it the one he had made from pieces of the fourteen others.

This whole bill he put into his pocket.

"There," said he. "In my dream I thought that this package would be destroyed. Is it true?"

"Yes. That package containing the patchwork bill would certainly be destroyed."

"And there would be no evidence of the crime. The thief would have a bill that would pass anywhere. Plenty of whole bills are sent to be redeemed when they are nearly as good as new."

"Mr. Bowton," said Daniels, "this is simply marvelous. Why, sir, this man has shown us how anybody can steal any amount from the Government and then make the Government destroy the only evidence against him."

"They say angels may whisper to us in our dreams," said the wild-eyed visitor; "but sometimes it is the devil!"

"It must have been the devil who thought out that trick. Why, every clerk in the Redemption Division could make a thousand dollars a week easily, if he knew that game."

"I have no further message, sir, for you from Dreamland," said Doctor Radcliffe. "If any more should come I will send for you."

"But, sir," said Mr. Daniels, "I am interested in you. Where are you from?"

"Dreamland."

"Yes, but who are you?"

"A dreamer, sir; only a professional dreamer."

This was all the satisfaction Mr. Daniels could get.

When he was gone, Mr. Bowton closed the door and said:

"Nick Carter, you beat the devil."

"Yes; I guess so," said Nick, pulling off his long hair and beard; "I have beaten one devil, at least—and a she-devil, at that."

"Who?"

"Mrs. Marquhar."

"What? Mrs. Marquhar? No!"

"Yes; Mrs. Marquhar."

"Mr. Carter, explain."

"No, let things explain themselves. Enough that she is a thief and will certainly be caught on the tip I gave."

"But, my dear sir, Mr. Hepperson tells me he has proposed to Mrs. Marquhar. He thinks she's an angel. If she is a bad woman, he must be saved from such a marriage."

"Call him in."

Mr. Hepperson had stepped out of the bank for a moment.

While they were waiting for him, Mr. Bowton asked:

"Mr. Carter, why did you appear to Mr. Daniels as a fantastic lunatic?"

"Simply because I don't want to be bothered any further with that case. Of course it was my duty to put Mr. Daniels on his guard, but that is all the interest I have in the matter."

"Daniels was deeply interested."

"That's it; and he would annoy me and you, too, if I had told him this as your friend Hardy. Doctor Radcliffe, the crank, will never be heard of again, and nobody will ever have to explain his absence."

"Now I'll walk out of the bank as Radcliffe and that will wind him up. I'll return as Hardy and talk to Hepperson."

Nick, as the crank, went out, and Mr. Hepperson came in.

He did not have to wait long for Mr. Hardy.

"Mr. Hepperson," said Nick, "I fear I have some bad news for you."

"Bad news?"

"Mr. Bowton and I have been gossiping a little. I told him that you showed very plainly at the reception last night that you admired Mrs. Marquhar, and he told me that you had proposed marriage to her."

"I did not mean to make it public, Mr. Bowton," said Mr. Hepperson.

"It will not be made public. That is precisely what we wish to avoid," said Nick. "That is why we have called you in here. Mr. Bowton is your friend, and when I told him that Mrs. Marquhar had been caught stealing large sums from the Treasury—"

"Mr. Hardy, is this some awful joke?"

"No, Mr. Hepperson; it is the awful truth. Mrs. Marquhar will be dismissed to-morrow if she has not been

already. Mr. Bowton wished to save you from a fate worse than death, so I have told you in order that you might break the engagement if one exists."

Mr. Hepperson put his hand to his head and reeled. Mr. Bowton steadied him.

"If I were you, Mr. Hepperson," said Nick, "I would write to her at once withdrawing my proposition."

Mr. Hepperson stood in deep thought a moment. Then he said:

"I will do as you suggest. I will write to her at once."

"Has she accepted your offer?"

"No; she only gave me hope for the future."

"Then there can be no breach of promise suit if you withdraw your offer before she accepts it."

Mr. Hepperson sat down at his desk to write the letter.

Nick took out a large envelope and said to Mr. Bowton:

"May I step into the vault and put this deed into my box?"

"Certainly."

By the time Mr. Hepperson had completed his letter, Nick came out of the vault and said:

"It may be well, Mr. Hepperson, for you to have a witness to the fact that she received your letter of withdrawal before she accepted your offer. I will gladly serve you as such a witness if you wish. I will deliver your letter to her in person and at once, if you desire."

Mr. Hepperson was much calmer now.

"I will thank you, Mr. Hardy, if you will take it to her at once."

Nick put the letter into his pocket and stepped out through Mr. Bowton's room.

"Don't sleep to-night," he said, as he passed Mr. Bowton. "Stay in your library, and when I tap on the window, come out quickly."

Nick hurried toward the Treasury Building with Hepperson's letter.

CHAPTER VIII.

A NIGHT SCENE IN THE BANK.

That night Chick went slyly to the dark corner of the Elton grounds. He meant to climb into the big tree before Sanders and Mrs. Marquhar reached it. But they had changed the hour of their meeting and were there ahead of him.

As he dropped down behind the fence, he heard Mrs. Marquhar say:

"Yes; I believe you now. You have lied to me all the way through, but this time I happen to know you are telling the truth."

"How do you happen to know?"

"He has told me the same thing."

"He has?" asked Sanders, in a tone of great surprise.

"Yes."

"Then you know—"

"Ah! Don't talk so loud. Do you want the whole town to know it?"

They lowered their voices so much that Chick could not hear what they said.

He crept carefully along the fence to a nearer point.

"Yes; I'll do it," was the next thing he heard Sanders say.

"Then be there at one o'clock."

"All right. Where will you be?"

"I'll have the boat ready. Come straight down the street to the river."

Sanders and Mrs. Marquhar separated.

Chick had heard but little, but with what he already knew, that little was very important.

Soon after midnight, Nick tapped on Mr. Bowton's library window.

In an instant the banker was at the door.

"What's up?" he asked.

"Come on," said Nick.

They hastened to the bank.

Mr. Bowton opened the front door.

When they were inside, Nick told him to lock it.

Nick led the way to Mr. Bowton's private office.

They entered this and turned the key.

Nick wheeled a table before the door and placed Mr. Bowton upon it where he could look out through the transom.

"Stand there," said he, "and you will see something."

"What is it?"

"You'll see. But don't move or speak until I tell you to."

"Is there any danger? I am not armed."

"You don't need to be. Never mind what strange sights you see, don't say a word or do a thing. Don't speak to me unless I speak to you."

"I will do as you say."

"That's right."

They had waited in silence for half an hour when they heard a key in the front door lock.

Presently a man entered.

Mr. Bowton wanted to speak, but remembered Nick's warning and kept silent.

The man locked the door behind him and walked straight to the vault.

In a few moments the vault door swung open and the man walked in.

He did not stay in the vault a minute.

When he came out he carried a large tin cash-box.

The man locked the vault door behind him and left the bank, locking also the front door behind him.

"Did you recognize him?" asked Nick.

"Yes. What does it mean?"

"Can't you guess?"

"No. Why should Hepperson come here at this hour and get his box?"

"Can't you figure it out?"

"No."

"There's a woman in the case."

"Mrs. Marquhar?"

"Yes."

"She has been exposed."

"Well?"

"Does Hepperson love her?"

"I think he does."

"What did he have in his box?"

"Some letters and private papers, I believe. He once showed me a package of his mother's and father's love letters that he kept there."

"Did he keep any money in his box?"

"A little, perhaps. Not much, surely. He kept his money on deposit with the bank."

"He could have drawn it out?"

"Yes."

"And in that case it's in the box?"

"Probably."

"Well, if there's a woman in the case and money in the box, can't you figure out the natural consequence?"

"You don't think Hepperson is going to elope with Mrs. Marquhar, do you?"

"N-n-n-no; not quite."

"What do you mean?"

"That he won't elope with her."

"Ah! I see now. How stupid I am! He is going to help her away before her disgrace is known. I ought to have guessed that at first. It is just such a thing as Hepperson would do for the woman he had once loved, even if she had proved herself unworthy."

"Sh!" said Nick.

Mr. Bowton heard nothing. His ears were not Nick's.

"We must get out there!" exclaimed the detective.

He and Bowton jumped from the table, and Nick drew it away from the door, turned the key, and slipped out into the bank.

"Unlock the door, please."

Mr. Bowton hastened to obey.

Nick sprang out and turned into the alley beside the bank.

Mr. Bowton was close behind him.

The banker, looking beyond Nick, saw the body of a man lying in the alley. Bowton uttered a loud cry.

The detective stooped over the prostrate form, and put his ear to the man's breast.

Mr. Bowton raised the man's head.

"Heavens!" said he, "it is Hepperson."

A policeman came across the street.

"Officer, ring for an ambulance. Take this man to the Emergency Hospital."

Nick spoke a few words in a low tone to the officer.

The policeman took charge of unconscious Hepperson and Nick led Mr. Bowton to the bank door.

"Go into your office and wait until I come back."

Mr. Bowton went in and Nick started toward the river.

Chick had given him the necessary directions, so he lost no time in reaching the right point.

As he ran down from the deserted street to the river bank, he saw a man lying helpless near the water's edge.

"Hallo, Sanders," said Nick, bending over the man, "somebody must have got here ahead of you."

"Who are you?" asked Sanders.

"Oh, nobody but Nick Carter."

"Nick Carter! The devil!"

"No, Sanders; not as bad as that."

Nick bent over him and began loosening the end of a lariat which bound Sanders' legs.

"Look here, Nick Carter," said Sanders, "if you're at work on this case, I'm ready to tell the whole story. I've—"

"Never mind," said Nick. "You needn't tell me anything. I know all about it. Come with me."

He helped Sanders to his feet and the two went to the bank where Mr. Bowton was waiting.

CHAPTER IX.

THE BOX COMES BACK.

When Mrs. Marquhar parted from Sanders under the big tree in the Elton grounds, Chick hurried away to tell Nick what he had learned.

Then he went to the river.

At the foot of the street on which the Cumberland Bank was situated he found a light, trim boat tied under a tree which grew low and almost hid it. The oars were set ready for use.

He looked it over hastily and ran down the river-bank until he found another boat.

"It's a clumsy thing," said he to himself, "but it will have to do. There's no time to be particular."

He easily picked the padlock which held it to a stake and soon brought a pair of oars from a small barn near by.

Then he went back, and by means of a small rope and staple, fastened a heavy stone to the stern of the light boat.

"They'll have to take a little handicap if I've got to row that heavy old scow," he said.

When everything was ready he concealed himself and waited.

A little before midnight Mrs. Marquhar came and put a satchel into the stern of the boat.

Then she unfastened the chain, took her seat at the oars, and waited.

Presently Sanders came running down the bank toward the tree. He carried a box under his arm.

"Here," said Mrs. Marquhar.

"Ready?" Sanders asked, as he set the box in the bow of the boat.

"Yes; shove off."

He pushed the boat free from shore and jumped in.

"Give me the oars," said he.

"No," answered Mrs. Marquhar; "sit still. I'll row. You keep watch."

She pulled sturdily, but the boat did not shoot forward very rapidly.

The stone dragging behind was doing its work.

"Here," said Sanders, "let me row. You'll never get us across."

He rose to take the oars, but as he stepped over

the seat, Chick saw him fall and heard a splash in the water.

Sanders came to the surface of the water with an oath on his lips.

Mrs. Marquhar leaned over the stern of the boat.

In the darkness Chick could not make out whether she was going to help Sanders into the boat again or not. That question, however, was soon settled, for she raised one of the oars and struck a vicious blow at his head.

Sanders turned and swam back to shore, muttering terrible oaths against her.

As he came out of the water and started to run down the bank toward the other boat, he felt the coil of Chick's lariat about his neck.

In an instant Chick was upon him, and Sanders soon lay bound hand and foot.

Chick leaped into the heavy boat and set out in pursuit of Mrs. Marquhar.

He overhauled her boat near the other shore and jumped into it.

"Who are you? What do you want here?" asked Mrs. Marquhar.

"Never mind who I am. I want you."

"What for? What have I done? What right have you to get into my boat?"

"Never mind about rights now. We'll talk about those later. Just now I want you."

"Are you an officer?"

"Yes."

"Then of course I must submit to you. But will you please tell me why I am arrested?"

Chick merely pointed at the box.

"Well," said she, "what about that? It belongs to Mr. Hepperson."

"What are you doing with it here?"

"Well, sir, if you want to know, Mr. Hepperson and I were going away together."

"An elopement, eh?"

"Call it so if you wish. I suppose a single lady has a right to elope with an unmarried man."

"But that was not Hepperson in the boat with you."

"No; I don't know who that man was. I got the boat ready and was waiting for Mr. Hepperson, who had gone to the bank to get his box. This man came with the box and jumped into the boat. I thought it was Mr. Hepperson until we were out in the stream."

"Then you pushed him overboard and tried to break his head with an oar."

"When I saw that it wasn't Mr. Hepperson, I knew it was somebody who had robbed Mr. Hepperson of his box, and I did what I could to save the box; for of course this man would have run away with it as soon as we got across the river."

"Smart woman!" said Chick to himself. "Tells a pretty good story on short notice."

"What's in that box?" he asked of her.

"Mr. Hepperson's private papers."

"Let's see," said Chick, moving as if to open the box.

Mrs. Marquhar sprang toward the box and sat down upon it.

"I command you, sir, not to break into that box. It is Mr. Hepperson's private property. He has done nothing against the law, and you have no right to burglarize his box."

"That's so," said Chick. "But I have a right to restore the box to Mr. Hepperson if it is his."

"I have no objection to that. I meant to do so myself."

"Very well, then, we will go together."

Chick reached over the stern of the boat, cut the rope that held the stone, and rowed the boat to the shore from which it had come.

"Where are you going?" asked Mrs. Marquhar.

"To find Hepperson."

"Do you know where he is?"

"We can find him."

When they reached the shore, Sanders was gone.

Nick had been there and taken him away.

Chick carried Hepperson's box, and Mrs. Marquhar walked beside him.

Chick took Mrs. Marquhar and the box directly to the Cumberland Bank.

When they arrived there they found Mr. Bowton, Nick, and Sanders waiting for them.

CHAPTER X.

SANDERS TELLS THE TRUTH.

Nick left the bank and soon returned with Hepperson, who had a bandage about his head.

When Hepperson saw his box standing in the middle of the floor, he reeled into the chair that Nick had placed for him and sat there, a picture of despair.

"Well, Chick," said Nick, "what have you to report?"

Chick told the story as Mrs. Marquhar had told it to him in the boat.

As this story progressed, Mr. Hepperson seemed to brighten up and take more interest in what was going on.

When Chick had finished the story he went out.

Then Hepperson feebly got upon his feet and claimed his box. He asked permission to take it and go away.

"It contains a little money of mine," he said. "This villain would have robbed me of it."

He pointed to Sanders, who sat with sullen face, the embodiment of reckless desperation.

"Well, Sanders," said Nick, "this looks pretty bad for you. A man who was pardoned less than two weeks ago can't expect much mercy when he comes up to be sentenced for highway robbery."

Sanders had been sullenly silent up to this time. Now he was angry.

"I have been duped by this woman," said he, "and now I'm ready to tell all I know about it."

"Go ahead," said Nick, leaning back in his chair.

"Well, Mrs. Marquhar came to me in prison and agreed to get me pardoned if I would give her half of the hidden boodle I had stolen from the bank. The trouble is, I didn't rob the bank, and I didn't know where the boodle was, but I saw a chance to get free, so I let her think I did. Then I told her it would take some money for the expenses while I was getting the boodle, and she agreed to furnish that."

"You worked her for that?" said Nick.

"Yes; I worked her."

"Go on."

"I had been convicted on evidence furnished mostly by Hepperson, and I knew he had lied under oath, so I made up my mind he was the real robber."

"I worked night and day trying to find where he had the money hidden. I disguised myself as a darky and watched the bank nights, thinking I might learn something, for Hepperson was often in the bank after dark."

"I finally told Mrs. Marquhar that I was not the robber, and she said she knew it; that Hepperson had told her he had the money."

"Hepperson wrote that to her," said Nick to Mr. Bowton, "in the letter which I carried for him yesterday—the same letter in which he arranged for the elopement."

"Mrs. Marquhar told me," continued Sanders, "that Hepperson wanted to elope with her, but that she didn't want to be bothered with him."

"She said she preferred me. So it was arranged that I was to sand-bag Hepperson and she and I were to run away with the boodle, which was in his box."

Mr. Bowton seemed dazed.

"Hepperson the thief! Can it be possible?" he muttered. "Nick Carter, how did you come to suspect this? You must have done it early, for all your work has tended to one end."

"It was perfectly simple. Your Washington officers should have known it at once."

"I had your description of the safe doors. They saw them. You told me where the pieces of lock lay—outside the doors!"

"Could they have been blown through the doors? Nonsense. Then what follows?"

"Why, the doors were open when the explosions took

pla Then they were opened by means of the combina-
tie and the explosions were a blind.

"So it was an inside job. That narrowed the problem down to a very few men, and I soon picked out Hepperson."

"Then our money is in that box," exclaimed Mr. Bowton, "and has really never been outside of the vault until to-night? To think that we have searched Washington all over for it when it was right here guarded by our own locks all the time!"

During this recital Hepperson had relapsed into his condition of despair.

"Mr. Hepperson, will you kindly open your box?" said Nick.

Hepperson opened the box.

There was nothing but waste paper in it.

All but Nick started to their feet with exclamations of surprise.

"Mr. Carter," said Mr. Bowton, "you have made an awful bungle. The money is gone."

Nick smiled.

"Mr. Bowton, will you please bring Alexander Hardy's box from the vault?"

The box was brought and Nick unlocked it.

There were the money and bonds that had been stolen from the bank.

"I thought it would be better not to let it get out of the vault," said Nick, calmly. "So I transferred it yesterday from Hepperson's box to my own."

Chick and Senator Sanford came in.

When the Senator learned of the part his niece had played he wept like a child.

"Senator Sanford, your niece had very bright red hair, I believe."

As Nick said this he snipped a lock from Mrs. Marquhar's head.

"This woman's hair," he continued, "is another color."

He tossed the lock into a basin of water and the water was soon turned red.

"Those aniline dyes never were very good for the hair," said he.

"Do you mean that Mrs. Marquhar is not my niece?"

"No; I mean this woman is not Mrs. Marquhar."

Nick took from his pocket a telegram. It was from Sacramento, California. It said:

"Mrs. Marquhar is here. Just returned from China.
(Signed.) "PATSY."

"This woman," said Nick, "is merely an adventuress who knew about your niece, and got up this scheme to personate her in order that, by your influence, she could get into the United States Treasury. You know what she did there."

The net result of the case was the recovery of the money, and the landing of Sanders, Hepperson, Tom Jackson, the waiter—who was a crook, and a pal of Sanders—and the bogus Mrs. Marquhar in prison.

Hepperson's case certainly proved that the way of the transgressor is hard.

He had spent not a penny of the stolen money. It might as well have lain in the bank's safe so far as he was concerned.

He had simply waited for the time when he should spend it, and the time had never come.

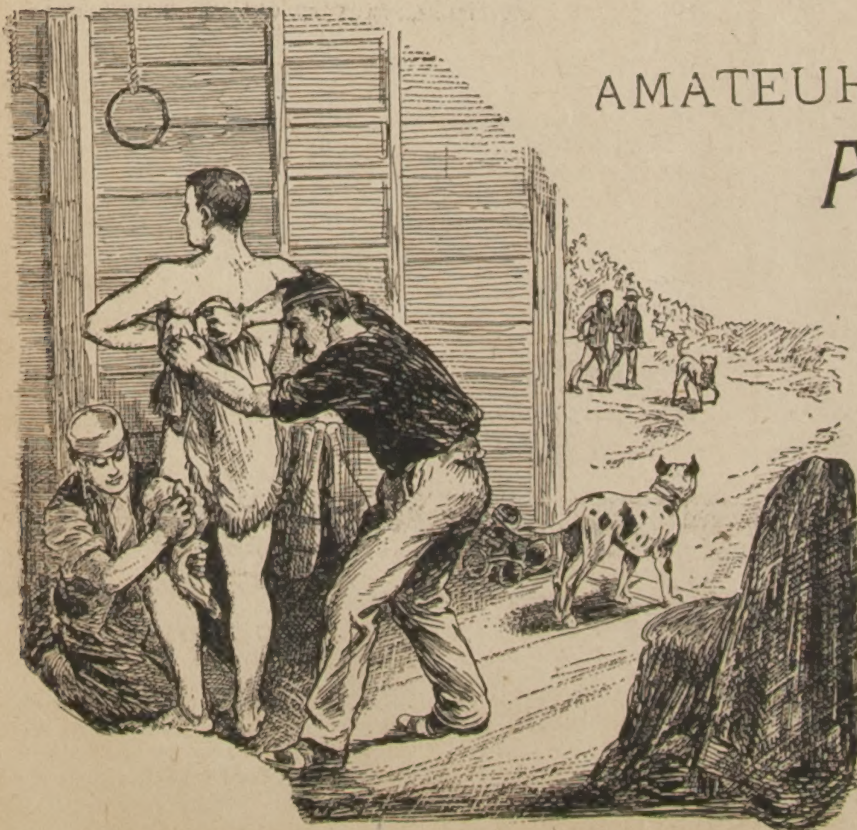
Bowton in his gratitude would have given Nick anything he asked for; but the great detective, as usual, was very moderate in his charge, considering the extent of his service to the bank.

(THE END.)

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